

Universal Design and Visitability Definitions

Universal Design

Universal design is an approach to designing products and environments to be appropriate for all people, including those with physical, cognitive, or sensory impairments. This concept is defined by the Center for Universal Design as “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.” Within a residential setting, examples of universal design features include a blended step-free entrance route, multiple countertop heights, wide doorways, lever faucets, and a curbless shower with hand held adjustable shower head. Rather than being geared solely to older adults and people with disabilities, universal design features are intended to have general utility and market appeal.

Visitability

Visitability, a concept formalized by the advocacy group Concrete Change, is based on the principle that all new homes should include a few basic features that make them accessible to people regardless of their physical abilities. Unlike universal design, which can be applied to a variety of products and environments, the notion of visitability is focused exclusively on housing. A visitable home has a main level that is easy to enter and exit. The three key features are:

- One zero step entrance on an accessible path of travel from the street, sidewalk or driveway. A zero step entrance has no step or threshold to block a wheelchair or trip a person with limited mobility.
- Doorways that provide 32 inches clear space throughout the home's main floor and hallways that provide 36 inches of clear width.
- Basic access to a half or full bath on the main floor. A bathroom with "basic access" has sufficient length and width for a person using a wheelchair to enter and close the door.